NORTHFLEET HARBOURSIDE

CALL IN INQUIRY

APPLICANT'S STATEMENT OF CASE

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 This Statement of Case has been prepared on behalf of Northfleet Central 1 Ltd (the "Applicant") who are the applicant for the proposed development known as "Northfleet Harbourside".

1.2 The Site (the "Site") consists of 19 ha of previously developed land within the settlement boundary of Gravesend and the area known as Northfleet. It is occupied by low-rise buildings that provide a range of employment opportunities, a car show room, small-scale retail & leisure activities, an orthodontist and four residential properties. The site also encompasses land-based aggregate handling activities at Robins Wharf, as well as the grounds for Ebbsfleet United FC.

1.3 In summary, the proposed scheme (the "Proposed Development") seeks the redevelopment of the site to deliver the realignment of the A226, 9 acres of public open space, 3,500 homes (with 10% affordable), a new 8,000 seat stadium for Ebbsfleet United FC, non-residential uses including retail, leisure, food & beverage, office, indoor sports, hotel, healthcare and community uses, all to be delivered across five new neighbourhoods.

1.4 Gravesham Borough Council ("the Council"), which is the local planning authority for the application (reference 20221064), resolved to grant planning permission for the Proposed Development on 30 April 2024. The application was then called in by the Secretary of State for her consideration on 07 February 2025.

OVERVIEW OF THIS STATEMENT OF CASE

1.5 This Statement sets out the case which will be made by the Applicant in relation to the key matters identified by the Secretary of State's call-in letter. A comprehensive review of the planning considerations is provided within the Statement of Common Ground prepared with Gravesham Borough Council ("the Council").

1.6 In summary, it is the Applicant's position that:

- the administrative area of a Council that is only able to identify a 3-year housing supply (increased from 2.7-years at the point of submission of the application), and has historically under-delivered against its housing need, scoring 59% in the latest Housing Delivery Test. The Local Plan is aged, and policies are out of date. Accordingly, NPPF §11d is engaged and the presumption in favour of sustainable development applies.

- the Proposed Development is consistent with Government policy for delivering a sufficient supply of homes, being a proposal for new homes on brownfield land in a sustainable location,

- the Proposed Development is consistent with Government policy for building a strong, competitive economy, being a proposal which will increase the number of jobs provided and improve the diversity of industry sectors represented, providing jobs at a wide range of skill levels;

- the Government and local policies for facilitating the sustainable use of minerals are not undermined, and the proposals are largely compliant with regard to the tests within the policies;

- the Proposed Development is consistent with the development plan for the area;

- the benefits arising from the Proposed Development are such that they clearly outweigh the harm arising from it;
- having carefully and robustly considered the scheme and associated planning balance, the Council was right to resolve to grant permission for the application; and
- planning permission should be granted without delay.

1.7 For a detailed description of the following items, please see the relevant sections of the Committee Report of 30 April 2024:

1.7.1 Description of the site and the surrounding area section 1

1.7.2 Description of the Proposed Development section 3]

1.7.3 Description of the planning policy framework section 4

1.8 In accordance with the Planning Inspectorate's Procedural Guide to Planning Appeals,[1] we declare that there has been no use of AI technology to create or alter any part of this Statement of Case.

[1] https://www.gov.uk/guidance/use-of-artificial-intelligence-in-casework-evidence

2.0 APPLICANT'S STATEMENT OF CASE

2.1 The proposals for Northfleet Harbourside would realise a unique opportunity for comprehensive redevelopment of well-connected and underutilised brownfield land to deliver significant levels of housing and employment growth. The location of the Site within the Northfleet Embankment and Swanscombe Peninsula East Opportunity Area is such that the principle of riverside regeneration is firmly settled.

2.2 The case being presented will demonstrate that the scheme accords with the development plan and the NPPF. The matters on which the Secretary of State wishes to be informed are as follows:

DELIVERING HOMES

2.3 The Proposed Development would deliver 3,500 homes.

2.4 The Site is in a highly sustainable location. It is accessible by a variety of public transport connections which serve London (18 minutes rail journey), Gravesend (3 minutes rail journey), Dartford (35 minutes via bus). Future connections to London from Gravesend via river boat are also available, with a journey time of around one hour.

2.5 The Council's administrative area has extensive areas of Green Belt land. The Council is therefore in a position whereby brownfield land is under increased pressure to be used in an optimal manner to deliver development that meets local need.

2.6 The Council's local need for housing is 672 homes per annum using the 2024 standard method. This compares to a housing requirement set in adopted policy CS02 of 440 homes per annum.

2.7 The Council is unable to demonstrate a 5-year housing supply and currently claims to have a supply of 3-years – a significant shortfall. The Council has also underperformed with delivery, with a score of 59% in the most recently published result of the Housing Delivery Test ("HDT").

2.8 Coupled with its age, the housing delivery statistics mean that NPPF the relevant policies of the plan are deemed to be out of date and NPPF § 11d is engaged and the tilted balance in favour of sustainable development applies.

2.9 The Proposed Development would equate to 5.2 year's supply of housing against the standard method, and c7.9 years' supply against the local plan housing requirement.

2.10 Of the housing proposed, 10% of the homes would be affordable. This is more than the maximum reasonable provision identified by financial viability appraisal which was thoroughly interrogated by the Council's appointed surveyors. The Applicant will commit to viability reviews to allow any improvement in scheme viability to be directed towards the provision of additional affordable housing. The base level affordable housing delivery should be put in the context of historic delivery of affordable housing within the Council's administrative area, which has been just 618 homes over the last five years.

2.11 The approach to housing therefore fully accords with Chapters 4 and 5 of the NPPF. The Proposed Development is particularly lent support by §125(c) of the NPPF, which requires that decision-makers give

substantial weight to the value of using suitable brownfield land within settlements for homes, and that such proposals should be approved unless substantial harms would be caused.

BUILDING A STRONG ECONOMY

2.12 The Proposed Development would deliver up to 53,500 sqm of employment-generating floorspace, in addition to the stadium, community and healthcare floorspace which will also provide jobs for local people. The proposed development on completion would significantly increase the number of jobs on site. The expectation is that this will raise from c520 FTE to c2,250 FTE across a range of employment opportunities. This includes c950 FTE in office-based jobs, with the remainder across retail, leisure, and hospitality, delivering employment which have long-term training and career progression opportunities. The proposed development will also boost Northfleet and Gravesham's Gross Value Added (GVA).

2.13 At present, the Site primarily comprises of single storey industrial buildings, areas of open storage, and minerals handling operations. There are also car dealerships and small-scale retail units. The type of activities undertaken in the existing buildings include low-density employment uses centred around manufacturing.

2.14 Northfleet is one of the most deprived places in England according to the English Indices of Deprivation 2019, and the application site falls within one of the 10% most deprived Lower layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs) nationally. This position was recognised by government with the Council receiving £20m of levelling up funding to support community initiatives.

2.15 Currently, there is an economic reliance in this area on manufacturing and other heavy industry jobs, with little variation in the range of employment opportunities. There are also low job density land uses in the form of car showroom and minerals wharf which occupy larger areas of land with low levels of direct employment. Given the minimal diversity of uses in this area (including residential), the opportunities for increased levels of crime and social deprivation are high. The Applicant will work with existing businesses to secure their relocation by agreement, but will use the CPO process, where it is necessary.

2.16 It is acknowledged that there would be a loss of the existing employment floorspace and typology. The Applicant will say, however, that change has been envisaged by the Council through local plan Policies CS03 and CS07 which identifies the site as being within an opportunity area and supports comprehensive redevelopment. Accordingly, the scheme would deliver a more effective use of land and create a wider range of employment opportunities.

2.17 In addition to the above, the Proposed Development will create temporary jobs during construction, alongside opportunities for learning and development (including apprenticeships) which will help to develop the skills of the local construction workforce.

2.18 The approach being taken to improve the employment opportunities and economic profile of the area accords on balance with objectives of Core Strategy Policies CS03, CS07 and fully accords with Chapter 5 of the NPPF.

MINERALS

2.19 The Site includes operational land associated with Robins Wharf (which is itself outside of the Site). Robins Wharf ("the Wharf") is used by aggregates businesses primarily to receive and batch coated roadstone and

mortar. The Wharf would no longer be able to accommodate these businesses because of the Proposed Development.

2.20 Kent County Council ("KCC"), which is the minerals and waste planning authority, has adopted planning policies which protect facilities including Robins Wharf. Policy DM8 of the Kent Minerals and Waste Local Plan ("KMWLP") provides, however, for the loss of the protected facilities. In particular, criterion 6 provides for the grant of permission for non-minerals development where the need for the Proposed Development overrides the presumption for safeguarding the protected site.

2.21 The Applicant will show that this policy criterion authorises the Proposed Development, by reason of the need for housing and economic development and the wider placemaking and environmental benefits which arise from the scheme. The degree of the impact of the Proposed Development on the aggregates industry will be explored at the inquiry.

2.22 Policy CS07 of the Council's Core Strategy also protects existing commercial wharves. The Proposed Development does not comply with §5.1.36 of this policy. The Applicant nonetheless maintains that the Proposed Development would comply with the wider regeneration aims for employment and housing of policies CS03 and CS07 and the development plan when read as a whole. Regard will also be had to the South-East Inshore Marine Plan as a material consideration on this matter

2.23 Notwithstanding the land-based activities, there is the potential in principle for the wharf to be used in the future for river borne transport servicing London and Gravesham, and the scheme does not preclude the use of the River Thames for transporting goods and aggregates to other wharves in Kent and Essex. The case will be made that there is capacity in the existing wharfs and alternative locations which will allow operations to continue with a minimal impact as possible subject to the existing occupiers being relocated.

2.24 NPPF Chapter 17 requires policies to be adopted which safeguard mineral resources and encourage prior extraction where practical and environmentally feasible (NPPF §223 c and d). It also states (at §225) that development should not normally be permitted in mineral safeguarding areas if it might constrain future use for mineral working.

2.25 The Applicant does not accept that the Site is located within a minerals safeguarding area, for KCC's SPD confirms (at §3.5) that urban settlement areas are excluded from minerals safeguarding areas. Notwithstanding, the existing condition of the site with built development within the urban area of Gravesham already precludes extraction, so that it is not practical or environmentally feasible to extract minerals and so no conflict with the NPPF arises.

PLANNING BALANCE

2.26 In line with NPPF §11d footnote 8 and §232, the key policies for determining the application are out of date and so the tilted balance is engaged. This means that permission should be granted for development proposals, unless the adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the scheme benefits.

2.27 The benefits to be weighed in the balance include:

- Delivery of 3,500 new homes across market housing and affordable tenures in the face of consistent undersupply and inability to identify a 5-year supply of homes;

- A net increase of 1,500 new jobs, in addition to construction and apprenticeship opportunities;
- More effective and efficient use of brownfield land, consistent with chapter 11 NPPF, and particularly important in Gravesham where non-Green Belt land is scarce;
- Comprehensive development that delivers a step-change in the quality of the local environment and quality of place;
- Enhancement of sports facilities and thereby the long-term viability of the football club for professional sports and other activities;
- Increase in employment-generating floorspace and jobs, broader range of commercial sectors accommodated on the Site and increase in Gross Value Added;
- Delivery of community and healthcare space to support a healthy community, consistent with chapter 8 NPPF;
- Improvements to the existing poor-quality environment, which has no open space, no areas of biodiversity, and does nothing to promote active travel;
- Provision of at least 9 acres of publicly available open space;
- A significant increase of c400% in biodiversity net gain through creation of new areas of landscaping, open spaces, deculverting of the River Ebbsfleet;
- Improvements to air quality;
- Improvements to food risk through de-culverting of River Ebbsfleet and improvements to the river wall for the Thames (chapter 14 of the NPPF);
- New bus stops and dedicated routes to facilitate future Fast Track services that promote sustainable transport links and reduce car reliance;
- Delivering multiple benefits from urban land / mixed use schemes (NPPF §125(a)(c)(d), and Chapter 8);
- Promotion of sustainable transport in line with Chapter 9 of the NPPF;
- Boost to the local economy through increased council tax and business rate opportunities expected to be in the region of £69m per annum in additional local (Gravesham) GVA. £20m per annum in resident retail and leisure expenditure, £5.6m per annum in additional council tax and an uplift of c£1 per annum in business rates.

2.28 The disbenefits of granting permission are the loss of the land-based activities associated with Robins Wharf, and the loss of jobs for those in existing employment at the Site. The Applicant will say that these two considerations do not clearly outweigh the benefits listed above and accordingly would not justify the withholding of permission.

2.29 The Applicant will show additionally that the proposals comply with the policies of the development plan (judged as a whole) and the NPPF. Even if the contrary view is taken, the Applicant will show that material considerations weigh heavily in favour of the Proposed Development. Permission should therefore be granted.

3.0 DOCUMENTS

3.1 It is expected that the following documents will be referred to in evidence by the Applicant's witnesses:

3.1.1 the development plan (including evidence base and monitoring reports) and associated guidance;

3.1.2 material considerations, including the NPPF;

3.1.3 the documents which formed part of or accompanied the application;

3.1.4 letters of representation;

3.1.5 relevant appeal decisions and case law;

3.1.6 the Council's committee reports; and

3.1.7 Council and government statistics.

3.2 The Applicant reserves the right to refer to additional documents in response to the cases of other parties as developed in evidence.

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